

TOWN OF SHREWSBURY

9823 Cold River Rd
Shrewsbury, VT 05738
802-492-3511 Voice /Fax

January 16, 2019

Commissioner June Tierney
Department of Public Service
112 State St., 3rd Floor
Montpelier, VT 05620-2601

Dear Commissioner Tierney:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the 2018 Vermont Telecommunications Plan. We want to focus our attention on one very serious deficiency in the Plan. The Plan does not deal with the need for adequate back-up power at the home to provide basic voice service during extended power outages. The fiber optic cable to the home service provided by Vermont Telephone Company, Inc. (VTEL) for a significant portion of Shrewsbury is dependent on the availability of electricity and in cases of a power shortage of significant duration is non-existent. VTEL is not meeting the basic tenet of Universal Service by failing to maintain voice service during power outages.

As Selectmen we are charged with establishing and maintaining the conditions and infrastructure to promote the safety and welfare of the residents of Shrewsbury. We take this responsibility seriously, and our residents' welfare is threatened by the ever-present vulnerability of power outage-related loss of communication capacity and of access to emergency services.

When VTEL installed fiber optic cable in Shrewsbury in 2015, our telecom service became dependent on electric service. VTEL installed a backup battery at each home to support telephone service, we were told, for up to eight hours during a power outage (these are CyberPower units containing a B.B. Battery lead acid VRLA rechargeable battery, PB 7.2-12). They do not last for eight hours, and in any outage greater than the battery capacity (as we had November 27-29, 2018), our residents have NO TELEPHONE SERVICE AT ALL.

Around-the-clock telephone access is essential for preservation of personal and public safety. If there is a power outage and the telephone battery is not working, people who are elderly, infirm, or living alone cannot request help. In fact, no one who has an emergency situation can get help for an accident, stroke, or heart attack; a child who is hurt or suddenly ill; a house or chimney fire; a school crisis; or any number of welfare- or life-threatening circumstances. Our concern for interruption of emergency phone service is heightened by the fact that Shrewsbury has very limited cell telephone coverage.

The consequences of not having telephone service in a natural disaster, often accompanied by a power outage, would be disastrous on a community-wide scale. And even when loss of telephone service due to lack of power occurs in non-emergency conditions, vital everyday functions like conducting personal or professional affairs, working from home, and running a business are interrupted, with attendant economic impacts.

We acknowledge the expanded use of generators for power outages, but we emphasize that many residents do not choose, or cannot afford, to purchase this equipment – nor should an ill-advised telecom company investment or installation decision force them to.

Perhaps the utility should upgrade the existing telephone backup batteries with high efficiency long-lasting ones so that basic voice service is maintained during power outages.

Lacking technical expertise ourselves, we look to our governmental and private entities to identify and propose solutions. We believe it is the responsibility of regulatory agencies to require solutions and of the telecom companies to implement and finance them.

The experience with VTEL we've had in Shrewsbury should be a cautionary warning for the Department in other requests for approval of fiber optic telecom installations: Do not permit electricity-dependent systems unless the telecom company provides for continued communication service for both emergency and customary use during power outage events.

We ask the Department of Public Service:

1. NOT to finalize the 2018 Telecom Plan until you have examined the issue of telecommunication electricity-dependency and amended the Plan and to acknowledge the problems that this dependency causes and to propose solutions for these problems.
2. To extend or reopen the public comment period specifically to obtain input on the amended Plan and on how adequately it defines and proposes measures to address and fix the problems associated with the electricity-dependency issue.

We also ask our Legislators to open inquiries in their House and Senate committees of jurisdiction to address the telecommunication electricity-dependency issue.

Finally, we ask the Department and VTEL to address our local telecom situation. The Plan states, "Vermonters need and expect affordable telecommunication services of good quality." VTEL, with the Department's knowledge, took dependable service away by disconnecting the copper lines and installing fiber optic. We ask you to find provide a solution for Shrewsbury. Do not leave our residents and first responders in the current unacceptable situation.

Please contact us if you have any questions. Thank you in advance for your attention.

Shrewsbury Selectboard,

/ss/

Aaron Korzun

Steven Nicholson

Bert Potter

Copies to:

June Tierney, Commissioner
Public Service Department
112 State Street, 3rd. Floor
Montpelier, VT 05620-2601

Carol Flint, Consumer Affairs Director
Department of Public Service
112 State Street, 3rd. Floor
Montpelier, VT 05620-2601
Carol.Flint@vermont.gov

Thomas Anderson, Commissioner
Department of Public Safety
103 South Main Street
Waterbury, VT 05671
Thomas.Anderson@vermont.gov

Barbara Neal, Executive Director
Vermont E - 911 Board
100 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05620-6501
Barbara.Neal@vermont.gov

John Quinn III, Secretary
Agency of Digital Services
133 State Street
Montpelier, Vt. 05633
John.Quinn@vermont.gov

Office of Governor Phil Scott
109 State Street, Pavilion
Montpelier, VT 05609

Senator Brian Collamore
bcollamore@leg.state.vt.us

Senator Cheryl Hooker
chooker@leg.state.vt.us

Senator James McNeil
jmcneil@leg.state.vt.us

Representative Logan Nicoll
lnicoll@leg.state.vt.us

Representative Timothy Briglin
Chairman, House Committee on Energy and Technology
tbriglin@leg.state.vt.us

Representative Robin Chestnut-Tangerman
rchestnut-tangerman@leg.state.vt.us

Senator Chris Bray
Chairman, Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy
cbray@leg.state.vt.us

Senator Corey Parent
Committee on Natural Resources and Energy
cparent@leg.state.vt.us

Representative David Potter
dpotter@leg.state.vt.us

Selectboards of:

Mt. Holly
c/o Mt. Holly Town Clerk - mthollytc@yahoo.com

Wallingford
c/o Wallingford Town Clerk - townclerk@wallingfordvt.com

Tinmouth,
c/o Tinmouth Town Clerk – tinmouthtown@vermontel.net

Middletown Springs
c/o Middletown Springs Town Clerk - middletown@vermontel.net

Rutland Regional Planning Commission
Ed Bove, Executive Director
PO Box 965
Rutland, VT 05702
EBove@rutlandrpc.org

Vermont Telephone Company
354 River Street
Springfield, VT 05156

Public Service Department
Comments regarding 2018 Vermont Telecom Plan
psd.telecom@vermont.gov

Senate Committee on Finance

Senator Ann Cummings, Chair
scummings@leg.state.vt.us

Senator Mark A. MacDonald, Vice Chair
mmacdonald@leg.state.vt.us

Senator Michael Sirotkin
msirotkin@leg.state.vt.us

Senator Brian Campion
bsirotkin@leg.state.vt.us

Senator Becca Balint
bbalint@leg.state.vt.us

Senator Randy Brock
rbrock@leg.state.vt.us

Senator Christopher A. Pearson
cpearson@leg.state.vt.us

e.c.
Faith Brown, Committee Assistant
fbrown@leg.state.vt.us

ee